

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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VIRGIN ISLAND LIZARD PROPOSED FOR ENDANGERED LIST

The St. Croix ground lizard has been proposed for the endangered species list because mongooses and construction activity threaten the species' continued existence, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The proposal, as published in the Federal Register, also includes a determination of critical habitat for the species. Interested persons have until April 8, 1977, to comment.

Only about 300 of the 7-inch reptiles remain on a total of 15 acres on two tiny islands off the coast of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. Eleven of the acres are on Green Cay which supports about 200 of the lizards. Of the four acres on Protestant Cay where the remaining population lives, two acres have already been developed into a hotel complex and the other two could be further altered by the construction of a tennis court which is presently under consideration. Development on Green Cay, now completely undeveloped, could also reduce the available habitat for the species.

The mongoose, a badger-sized carnivore introduced in the last century to the islands from India to control rodents, preys on the lizard and has been a major cause in the species decline. Although there are no mongooses on the two islands where the lizard now occurs, mongooses and feral house cats were responsible for wiping out the lizards on Buck Island and St. Croix and could easily do the same if introduced on Protestant or Green Cays. St. Croix now supports a mongoose population estimated to be as high as one per acre in some areas.

Persons wishing to participate in this rulemaking should submit written comments, preferably in triplicate, to the Director (FWS/LE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 19183, Washington, D.C. 20036.